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HOW COMMUNISTS WON CONTROL OF GUATEMALA

Country Presents Case History of Shift From a Dictatorship to Communism

Sydney Gruson, who has just returned to his post as THE NEW YORK TIMES correspondent in Mexico City from a trip to Guatemala, presents here a report on Guatemala as a case history of a country's swing from a traditional Latin-American dictatorship to a Communist-influenced Government.

By SYDNEY GRUSON

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES

MEXICO CITY, Feb. 28 — During the feudal "slumber" in which Guatemala existed under the regime of Gen. Jorge Ubico, from 1930 to 1944, the law and the general were one. He traveled around the country dispensing justice on the spot and, as often as not, deciding on a man's guilt or innocence by the "cut" of his face. The general liked to consider himself the "father of the people."

There were in Guatemala at that time only the poor and the rich, and the rich were very rich and very few, while the poor were very poor and plentiful. The country was perhaps as much as 90 per cent illiterate and the great bulk of the Indian peasants, two-thirds of the country's 2,750,000 population, were living as serfs of the big landowners. Things were not much better in the cities.

Revolutionary Movement

It was against this background that the Revolutionary Movement began to stir itself during the Second World War, long after most other Latin-American countries had started to shake off the residue from hundreds of years of Spanish colonialism. And it is against this background that the emergence of the Guatemalan Communist movement, and its rise to become perhaps the strongest organized power in the land, must be considered.

General Ubico had twice found excuses to overcome the constitutional bar against a President's succeeding himself. Finally, on June 28, 1944, he was overthrown by an armed revolt and resigned.

The military dictatorship that succeeded him under the pretext of preparing for free elections gave way on Oct. 20, 1944, when a group of young army officers, leading a small group of liberal students, won over the capital's garrison and installed a triumvirate to rule until their candidate, Professor Juan José Arevalo, could be installed as President in 1945. The start of the rise of the Communists can be dated from the moment Professor Arevalo assumed power.

Arevalo's Policies

A school teacher by profession, Arevalo had served in a number of minor official posts under Ubico and in 1935 as one of his private secretaries. He grew tired of the dictator's methods and left Guatemala voluntarily for a teaching job in Argentina's Universidad de La Plata.

Arevalo returned to Guatemala with a vague political philosophy of social reform based on slogans of the revolution. But it was essentially only a frame of a philosophy and the Communists rushed in to give it substance.

By then the Mexican revolution had failed its original promise of a Communist success. It was natural that the Communists should seek a new proselytizing opportunity, and Arevalo proved a rich ground for their seeds. Vicente Lombardo Toledano, at that time leader of the Mexican labor movement, shuttled back and forth between Mexico City and Guatemala as Arevalo's guest.

Gradually the school teacher-president took on more and more of the Communists' colors. With Lombardo as his political mentor he encouraged the Guatemalan group that stood on the far left of the revolutionary movement. The group was headed by José Manuel Fortuny and it was finally to emerge openly seven years later, on June 21, 1950, as the Communist party.

Liberty Front, Fortuny threw in

with the dissident faction that became the Partido Acción Revolucionaria (P. A. R.). He was the party's secretary general and editor of its newspaper. While still a member of P. A. R. he founded, on Sept. 28, 1947, an inner group known as the Democratic Vanguard.

Founding of the C. P.

Fortuny himself dates the founding of the Guatemalan Communist party from this, although it was not until May, 1950, that he and a group of followers resigned from the P. A. R. and announced their intention of establishing a Communist party. The group began publication of a Communist newspaper called Octubre and were known as "Octubre Communists" to distinguish them from the group around Victor Manuel Gutierrez, then secretary general of the Stalinist Revolutionary party of Guatemalan Workers.

This ceased to exist after Gutierrez took a trip to the Soviet Union and came back with the message that the workers were dispersing their strength in two Communist groups. It was Fortuny who became secretary general of the unified party that followed.

Communists were playing their

hand in the struggle going on for the Presidency. Between the October, 1944, revolution and the Arevalo inauguration in March, 1945, the country had been ruled by two of the military leaders of the revolution, Capt. Jacobo Arbenz and Maj. Francisco Arana, and Jorge Toriello, a civilian.

Toriello soon dropped out of the political picture. Arbenz became Minister of War under Arevalo, and Arana chief of armed forces. Arevalo encouraged each man in turn to believe he was the logical successor, but the Leftists tended to group themselves around Arbenz and the moderates around Arana, and this was the tip-off on how things would go.

Election of 1950

On July 18, 1949, Arana was assassinated on the road near Lake Amatitlán. Almost without exception Guatemalans believe both Arevalo and Arbenz knew of the plot.

With Arana out of the way, Arbenz won the 1950 Presidential election easily as the Administration's official candidate. By then an opposition to the Administration had reached some point at which their ends ought to have been reached some time ago.

Fortuny's manipulating, were Arbenz's most ardent supporters.

Whether he wanted to or not—and he has never indicated that he was willing to throw them over—Arbenz would have had difficulty in doing without the Communists.

By the time he came to power they were in control of the unions, the Government's radio and newspaper propaganda organs, and various other key jobs that gave them power far beyond their numbers.

Arbenz and Communists

Whatever Arbenz wanted, such as the controversial land reform law that now is pulling the country apart, the Communists went out to get for him. With their superior organization, their missionary zeal and devotion to party causes rather than self-enrichment, they became the force on which Arbenz apparently believes he can rely most.

He has had to pay the price of giving them more and more power. But he apparently does not feel that the price has been too high, although it is now a question in Guatemala whether Arbenz uses the Communists for his ends or the Communists use him. Their ends ought to have been reached some time ago.



Jose in The San Diego Union

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